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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000373

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI ARMY CORDONS OFF PROVINCIAL COUNCIL
BUILDING; ISOLATING COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

REF: A. BAGHDAD 330
[B](#). BAGHDAD 320

Classified By: Political M/C Gary A. Grappo for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#). (C) Summary: On February 9, the Iraqi Army (IA) formed a cordon around the Salah ad-Din (SAD) Provincial Council (PC) building, with orders reportedly from PM Maliki to prevent access by the PC Chair. The PC Chair warned that protests could escalate unless the IA was removed. He also reported the issuance and subsequent cancellation of a terrorism arrest warrant against him based on false testimony. He pledged that if the IA withdrew, the PC would return to talks with the opposition Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) to resolve the dispute over the seating of the governor-elect. The DCM and POL M/C have urged senior PM advisors to remove the IA from the SAD PC building immediately and refrain from using the Army to intervene in political disputes. End Summary.

Iraqi Army Forms Cordon Around PC Building

[2](#). (C) On February 9, the IA established a cordon around the SAD PC Building at approximately 9 p.m. local time, with orders to prevent PC Chairman Ahmed Abdullah Abid Khalaf ("Abu Mazin") from entering the building, according to MG Salah ad Din Mustafa Kamal al-Qradgh, the senior Iraqi Army Commander in SAD province. MG Oradgh told USF-I miloff that all other PC members and visitors were allowed access through the IA cordon. (Note: The building contains PC offices and meeting halls. The order is the latest act in the three-month standoff over the seating of the SAD governor-elect; see refs A-B. End note.)

[3](#). (C) MG Oradgh confided that he had told General Farouk Mohammad Sadiq Mahdi al-Araji, Director for the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (OCINC), that the Iraqi police, under the authority of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), should undertake this type of mission, particularly since the PC building is located on the grounds of the Provincial Police headquarters. MG Oradgh claimed that the PM,s response to General Farouk,s subsequent request for clarification was that the IA, not the police, should implement the order.

GOI View

[4](#). (C) In a February 10 meeting with Tariq Abdullah, senior advisor and Chief of Staff for PM Maliki, the DCM expressed USG concern about politicization of the IA in the SAD dispute. Abdullah replied that the IA was present around the PC building to "maintain stability," not to intervene in a political controversy. On Feb. 11, Pol M/C told Da,wa MP and Maliki advisor Sami al-Askari that the Army should not be enlisted to resolve internal political matters unless necessitated by security concerns that genuinely exceed police capabilities, which is not the case in SAD. Askari

replied that Iraq,s police was not yet capable of handling all security situations and that the PM,s order must have been motivated by security concerns. Pol M/C directed the PRT to ensure that the USG message to all interested parties in SAD be that the Iraqi Army should withdraw from the Provincial Council perimeter immediately.

Ratcheting Up the Pressure

¶15. (C) In a February 10 meeting in Baghdad, PC Chair Abu Mazin asked for Embassy assistance in persuading the PM to remove the IA from the PC building. He said there had been a peaceful demonstration at the facility that morning and that the PC majority coalition would escalate such protests until the IA withdrew. He said the next demonstration would be at the IIP headquarters in SAD. (Note: As reported ref B, the IIP has blocked the seating of the governor-elect through an QIIP has blocked the seating of the governor-elect through an unofficial hold on the issuance of a required Presidency Council decree. End Note.) A shut-down of government services throughout the province could follow, he warned. The PC Chair added that the PC would invite the media to cover its next session, which it would hold in a tent in the desert, to draw attention to the situation.

¶16. (C) Poloff told the PC Chair that the Embassy agreed that use of the IA to settle political disputes was inappropriate and that it would raise the issue with the GOI. Abu Mazin said that if the IA departed, the PC majority would call off demonstrations and restart discussions with the IIP on how to resolve the dispute over the election of the new governor.

Informal Dispute Resolution, SAD Style

¶17. (C) At the conclusion of his meeting with Poloff and PRToff, PC Chair Abu Mazin described how a few days earlier Ministry of Interior (MOI) Colonel Mohammed Sabah Idan had showed him a new arrest warrant against him based on terrorism charges. Idan offered to destroy the original warrant in exchange for \$250,000. Abu Mazin said that after bargaining the amount down to \$50,000, he promptly informed Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani of the bribery offer. Bolani directed that plain clothes officers accompany the PC Chair to the "drop site," who then arrested the Colonel. In a subsequent confession, Idan reportedly stated that the warrant was based on false accusations made by the Director of the IIP branch in SAD, which were engineered by the ousted SAD governor (IIP). Abu Mazin added that the case had been presented to the Central Criminal Court of Iraq (CCCI).

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